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ABSTRACT

A peer coaching approach was developed for use in the Multidisciplinary Diagnostic and Training Program (MDTP) at the University of Florida, in collaboration with Old Dominion University in Virginia. The MDTP provides diagnostic services to elementary-aged children with learning, behavior, and/or medical problems. The peer coaching model includes the three stages of planning/discussion, observation, and feedback. Teacher trainees shadow the MDTP teachers and learn the techniques of observation and coaching/feedback first hand; trainees are also placed in the role of teacher and coached in the same manner as the MDTP teachers. Teacher behaviors are observed and recorded, observations are tallied and reliability is calculated, and a coaching/feedback session is conducted. After review of the observational data, the teacher selects one behavior to increase or decrease in frequency. Peer coaching has been found to be an effective method for improving the training of preservice teaching personnel and enhancing the professional competence of classroom teachers. By reviewing their own teaching techniques and exploring alternatives in a nonjudgmental atmosphere, teachers and trainees have an opportunity to reflect on their teaching, experience feedback, and formulate hypotheses about the process and outcome of their instructional endeavors. (JDD)

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Peer Coaching: A Specific Approach for Improving Teacher Performance and Trainee Competence[1]

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RUNNING HEAD: Peer Coaching

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Abstract

Peer coaching approaches appear to have great potential for improving the training of preservice personnel and enhancing the professional competence of classroom teachers. A simple, easy to use peer coaching technique developed at the University of Florida Multidisciplinary Diagnostic and Training Program (MDTP) in collaboration with Old Dominion University is presented. The purpose for developing a peer coaching approach at the MDTP was to improve preservice trainee performance, refine the teaching competencies of our existing faculty, and to improve communication and rapport among teachers and trainees. The peer coaching technique to be discussed requires relatively little training and minimal time to implement. One of its major benefits is that it may be modified to meet the specific needs of individual trainees and teachers or the goals/missions of a school. The procedure may be useful for consulting teachers or personnel working with mainstream regular education teachers.

Peer Coaching: A Specific Approach for Improving Teacher Performance and Trainee Competence

In recent years a variety of field-based strategies have been tried as a means of improving teacher competence and morale, decreasing referrals to exceptional education programs and preparing new professionals for working within the demands of today's schools (Moffett, St. John & Isken, 1987). One alternative approach to inservice and preservice training gaining increased attention is peer coaching. Generally speaking, peer coaching refers to one of several approaches wherein teachers work in teams to support and promote their own professional growth and development. The coaching process typically includes discussion and planning, observation and feedback. Most peer coaching approaches require considerable training and sustained usage before they become the effective, efficient and enjoyable process advocated by many.

While peer coaching models vary, Garmston (1987) describes in relative detail three basic models--technical coaching, collegial coaching and challenge coaching. The peer coaching approach described herein was developed to be used in the Multidisciplinary Diagnostic and Training Program (MDTP) at the University of Florida. The MDTP provides comprehensive diagnostic services to children with learning, behavior and/or medical problems in grades k - 6 in north central Florida (for more information see Hendrickson, Ross, Mercer & Walker, in press). The MDTP peer coaching model is a combination of elements found in technical coaching and collegial coaching. As such it is based on the premises that: (a) teachers will improve when objective data are presented in a

nonthreatening and supportive manner and (b) teachers will acquire habits of self-initiated reflection provided they are given opporunity to develop such skills.

The major goals of the MDTP peer coaching approach are in accord with those to which Garmston (1987) refers in his description of technical and collegial coaching. That is, the goals of peer coaching are to increase collegiality and professional dialogue, establish a common vocabulary, refine teaching practices, promote the transfer of learning and stimulate self-initiating autonomous teacher thought. The MDTP model for peer coaching is one that has been developed over the past several years and is tailored to meet the unique needs of a short-term (i.e., six week) Diagnostic and Treatment Classroom (DTC). Like other models, the MDTP approach includes the three stages of planning/discussion, observation and feedback. Unlike most models, observation and feedback precede the discussion (for the preservice trainee). Instead, teacher trainees shadow the DTC teachers and learn the techniques of observation and coaching/ feedback first hand. Trainees also are placed in the role of teacher and coached in the same manner as the MDTP teachers. Since children come to the DTC for only six weeks, a tightly structured approach in which teachers observe, analyze and provide feedback has evolved.

Overview of the MDTP Peer Coaching Approach

This manuscript describes in detail the two core features of the MDTP peer coaching procedure--the observation system and the coaching/ feedback session. Included in the description of the observation system are target behaviors (definitions), the observation procedure itself and a form for observers to list newly observed behaviors. The "coaching/

feedback" session has five parts each of which is described so as to enable replication. Initially it is recommended that three observation-coaching sessions are conducted before the observed teacher (consultee) chooses a specific behavior s/he wishes to modify. After choosing a behavior to modify, a minimum of three additional sessions are conducted.

The observation sessions for peer coaching occur during (small) group instruction when the teacher is actively involved in the teaching process. For some teachers (e.g., special education teachers) this may mean 3 to 5 children, for others it my mean 15 children. As soon as possible after the peer coach has observed the other teacher, a coaching/feedback session is scheduled. These sessions are always scheduled on the same day, if possible. Observations sessions last ten minutes and the coaching/ feedback session averages 5-7 minutes. Once trained, teachers can carry out both aspects of coaching in less than 30 minutes.

Below the five fundamental steps of our peer coaching approach are listed. These steps are presented subsequently in greater detail .

Steps in Peer Coaching

1. Schedule on Observation Time . Observations should occur during the same type of lesson and during the same section of the lesson (e.g., beginning, middle, end).
2. Observe and Record Teacher Behaviors. Observe for 10 consecutive minutes using a 10 sec interval recording system.
3. Tally the Observations and Calculate Reliability. Make any anecdotal comments on the observation form.

4. Conduct the Coaching/Feedback Session. Do not spend over 10 minutes in the coaching session.
5. Confirm the Next Observation and Feedback Session.

Step 1: Schedule an Observation Time. Be sure that you have enough time to collect a full ten minutes of observational data. Confirm your scheduled time with the teacher and any participating trainees.

Step 2: Observe and Record Teacher Behaviors. Table 1 contains Teacher Behavior Definitions which we currently use at the MDTP. Figure 1 contains a form for the observer to use to place newly observed behaviors in their appropriate category (or discuss later with staff). Figure 3 is a sample Teacher Observation Form for Peer Coaching. As can be seen, the observation form is divided into 10 minute columns with 7 categories of consequent event behaviors (top of form) and 5 categories of antecedent behaviors (bottom of form). The "comments" section of the observation form is used to write antecdotal remarks pertaining to the lesson or the teacher's behavior.

As indicated, 10 minutes of data are collected, and the data reflect teacher behaviors that may be considered consequent and antecedent event behaviors. To use the observation form, it is necessary to memorize the definitions of these (or other) target behaviors (see Table 1). The sheet for listing new behaviors which fit designated categories (Figure 1) is attached to each Teacher Behavior Observation Form. Any behaviors not placed in a specific category (but discovered during an observation) should be listed under the appropriate category immediately following the

observation. The original definitions and all new examples should be reviewed immediately prior to each future observation session.

Coaches should be seated close enough to clearly see and hear the teacher. If a second observer is with the primary coach, they may sit side by side. In such instances, the primary observer should say, "ready", "look" and "mark" every 10 seconds for both observers. The behavior in which the teacher is engaged when "look" is called, is the behavior that is recorded. A tape recorder with ear phones is a useful alternative to calling "ready, look, mark" aloud.

In the past we have used the wall clock or a watch with a second hand to determine when to look and mark. As a rule, the primary observer says, "Minute 1, begin" as the second hand passes 12. Three to four seconds before the second hand approaches 2, 4, 6, and so on, the primary observer says, "ready", "look" and "mark". (This procedure allows one tally to be made every 10 seconds. As mentioned, a tally or slash mark represents the behavior that was occurring when the primary observer said, "look". Each minute column will have 6 behavior tallies. At the end of 10 minutes, 60 behaviors will have been recorded). As the second hand sweeps past the 12 the second time, the primary observer says, "Minute 2", and so on through the 10th minute. It is helpful to draw a slash mark through the minute number as you finish each minute.

Before beginning <u>each</u> observation, we add "s" and "g" (i.e., specific and general praise) to each of the 10 cells representing "praise" and "n" and "o" (i.e., narrow and open questions) to each of the 10 cells representing questions.

Oftentimes teachers use a part of their planning time to observe and/or have another teacher cover their teaching responsibilities for the brief period they need to observe someone else. Principals and guidance counselors may be willing to assist and/or participate as observers.

Step 3: Tally the Observations and Calculate Reliability (Optional). Once the observation is completed, write down any anecdotal comments you wish to remember about the lesson (e.g., how well it was paced, the satisfactoriness of the materials, how the students responded, how comfortable the teacher was, etc.) under "comments". Next, total the number of behaviors observed in each category to the right of the observation grid. If a second observer collected data, determine interobserver agreement by counting the number of agreements in each cell. If observer 1 has a tally in a cell not seen in the same cell of observer 2, circle the tally in observer 1's cell and circle a space in observers 2's cell (to indicate an omission). Count the total number of agreements and divide this number by the number of agreements plus disagreements x 100 to get the reliability. Reliability will be read as 95% agreement, 83.6% agreement, and so on.

Step 4: Conduct a 5-10 Minute Coaching/Feedback Session. Ideally, the feedback session should occur as soon after the observation as possible so the lesson will be fresh in the teacher's mind. The coach is responsible for keeping the session moving at a relaxed but steady pace. The entire session should last 5-7 minutes for optimal results. If two observers (coaches) are present, one will record. The primary data collector/coach usually records. Use the "Coaching/Feedback Session" form beginning at the top.

Once seated, the teacher who was observed states three things s/he liked about the lesson. Any remarks are acceptable, but s/he must state three things (e.g., the teaching strategy used was motivating, the materials were easy to use, s/he felt prepared, etc.) that s/he liked. Next, the observed teacher may point out things that s/he might change in the future. However, s/he may not wish to change anything. This is perfectly acceptable. During this time, the coach acknowledges and writes down what the teacher has stated. During the initial feedback sessions we do not encourage teachers to talk about what they would change. Instead we concentrate on a positive, brief exchange.

After hearing from the teacher, the coach tells (and records under "Observer Feedback: The DATA") the teacher about his/her rate of behavior in certain categories. The data are shared nonjudgmentally. The data collection form may be examined briefly. Next, the observer uses both the objective data and his/her anecdotal data to tell the teacher at least three aspects of the lesson that s/he liked. (Care must be taken to use both the objective and subjective observational information).

Finally, after one or more feedback sessions, the observer may provide feedback on one aspect of the lesson that might be modified. This is not required. Initially it may be ill-advised to provide any corrective feedback.

Step 5: Confirm the Next Observation and Feedback Session. If possible, set up the next observation and feedback session immediately. Weekly and monthly schedules are recommended.

Teacher Selection of a Behavior to Increase or Decrease

After a minimum of three sessions, the team may review all the observational data and the teacher may select one behavior to increase or decrease in frequency. In addition to the usual format of coaching, this target behavior will be discussed specifically after the next observation/ coaching session.

Comment on the teacher behavior categories. Teacher behavior strongly influences student behavior and learning. By regulating what we as teachers do immediately after (consequation) and immediately before (antecedents) a student's response, we can become very effective instructional agents (Stowitschek, Gable & Hendrickson, 1980). Therefore, the Teacher Behavior Definitions (Table 1) are divided into these two very important categories: consequent and antecedent events. Initially the coach may wish to observe only consequent events in that they often are the most easy to modify and may have the greatest observable impact on student behavior. Furthermore, they often are more easy to train in the naive observer.

While specific details of how to set up a coaching system have been provided. These certainly may be modified to meet the individual needs of a specific classroom or school. However, we have found the length of the observation and feedback sessions optimal for our purposes.

Conclusion

Peer coaching appears to be an effective method for improving teacher awareness of their own instructional behaviors, student behavior and the interaction of both. Across the past several years, student and staff response to the MDTP peer coaching approach has been very positive.

By reviewing their own teaching techniques and exploring alternatives in a nonjudgmental atmosphere, teachers and trainees have an opportunity to reflect on their teaching, experience feedback and formulate hypotheses about the process and outcome of their instructional endeavors. Coaches state that they learn as much from observing and giving feedback as they do by being observed.

Peer coaching is a planned, integral aspect of the overall Diagnostic and Training Classroom (DTC) schedule. Consequently the comitment to improved collegiality and quality instruction is both implicit and explicit. For others initiating a peer coaching program, a clear comitment by teachers and the administration is important to the potential success of the program. By establishing a set schedule for peer coaching, teachers and trainees alike have a regular opportunity to express their opinions, vent their frustrations and try out their ideas on others who truly understand the constraints and possibilities of their teaching environment and the students they serve.

In all, peer coaching appears to have great potential for improving the training of preservice personnel and enhancing the professional competence of classroom teachers. A peer coaching technique developed at the University of Florida Multidisciplinary Diagnostic and Training Program (MDTP) in collaboration with Old Dominion University was presented. The peer coaching technique discussed requires relatively little training and minimal time to implement. One of its major benefits is that it may be modified to meet the specific needs of individual teachers and/or the school.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Teacher Behavior Defintions

Figure 1: Form for Entering Examples of Teacher Behaviors

Figure 2: Teacher Observation Form for Peer Coaches

Figure 3: Coaching/Feedback Session Form

Table 1. Teacher Behavior Definitions

CONSEQUENT EVENTS	
Call On HAND RAISE:	The teacher asks a student with his/her hand raised to answer a question or recognizes the student with the raised hand so s/he has an opportunity to speak.
PRAISE: Specific	The teacher provides positive, enthusiastic feedback on the correctness of a response in a way that describes exactly what behaviors are intended to be reinforced (e.g., That was exactly the right way to multiple 22 x 7; you remembered to carry the 1. You really described the accident in perfect detail ! You gave the numeral 5 a flat hat so I know exactly what numeral it is !).
PRAISE: General	The teacher provides positive, enthusiastic feedback on the correctness of a response in a way that is nonspecific and leaves the student to infer precisely which behaviors are correct (e.g., That's great ! Wow, what good work, John ! You've really got it now !).
CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK:	Teacher verbalizations or vocalizations which indicate that the student(s) behavior is correct (e.g., repeats an answer in a neutral versus enthusiastic voice, "ok", "uhuh") or incorrect (e.g., "No, you forgot to carry the 3", "That's not quite right, try it again."). If a point card system is being used, the teacher gives or takes away points without verbalizing.
NEGATIVE:	The teacher criticizes or uses nag statements to show disapproval or correct an error.
Inappropriate WAIT:	The teacher interrupts or redirects the line of questioning, or restates the question before the student has an chance to answer (within 1-2 sec.) or an opportunity to answer fully.

Consequent Events (Continued)

Appropriate WAIT: The teacher attentively looks at the student while s/he initiates or attempts to give an answer/comment.

OTHER: The teacher engages in vocal, verbal and/or motoric activity that is not related to direct instruction (e.g., talks to the aide, checks student papers at her desk, steps out of the room).

ANTECEDENT EVENTS

ADVANCE ORGANIZERS: Teacher verbalizations which set the stage temporally for what is to come in the lesson/day. The steps or rules to guide the activity to follow are presented (e.g., First, we will read each paragraph silently. Next, I will call on someone from team A or B to read it aloud. Finally, I will give points to the team that reads correctly and points to the team that listened best).

Demonstration CUE/MODEL: The teacher provides a partial or full model of the actual behavior desired (e.g., sounds out part of a word, provides alternative choices, writes an example on the black-board, etc.).

MAND: A verbalization that requests, commands or demands action (e.g., Write all 25 math problems beginning now. Tell me exactly what Shakespeare said. Stop reading the minute the bell sounds.).

QUESTION Narrow: The teacher asks a question which implies a specific correct response. Usually narrow questions begin with who, what, when, where, and/or how much (e.g., What is the name of the largest continent? Who discovered America in 1492? Where will the Dallas Cowboys play their next football game?).

Antecedent Events (Continued)

QUESTION

Open: The teacher asks a question which is open-ended, no specific response is desired. Instead, the student is expected to provide his/her opinion or belief. Often these questions begin: Tell me about...? What do you think...? If you were..., What would you decide? Do you have any ideas about...?

GENERAL INSTRUCTION: Verbalizations that provide general information about the lesson or general directions related to the lesson.

Figure 1. Form for Entering Examples of Teacher Behaviors

Teacher Behavior Definitions

EXAMPLES from OBSERVATIONS

CONSEQUENT EVENTS

Call On
HAND RAISE: _____

PRAISE:
Specific _____

PRAISE:
General _____

CORRECTIVE
FEEDBACK: _____

NEGATIVE: _____

Consequent Events (Continued)

Inappropriate WAIT:

Appropriate WAIT:

OTHER:

ANTECEDENT EVENTS

ADVANCE ORGANIZERS:

Demonstration CUE/MODEL:

Antecedent Events (Continued)

MAND:

QUESTION Narrow:

QUESTION Open:

GENERAL INSTRUCTION:

Figure 2. **Teacher Observation Form for Peer Coaches**

Name of Teacher: _____ Instructional Setting: _____

Time, Day, Date: _____ Observer 1: _____

Observer 2: _____ Reliability: _____

MINUTE

Teacher Behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CALL ON Hand Raise										
PRAISE (S and G)										
FEEDBACK										
NEGATIVE										
Inapprop. WAIT										
Approp. WAIT										
OTHER										
ADVANCE Organizer										
Cue/Demo MODEL										
MAND										
QUESTION (N and O)										
General INSTRUC										

COMMENTS: _____

Figure 2. **Coaching/Feedback Session**

Teacher Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Observer 1: _____ **Observer 2:** _____

==========

I. Teacher Opinion: Things I **liked** about the lesson/session.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

II. Teacher Opinion: Things I **might** change in a similar future situation.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
_____
_____

==========

III. Observer Feedback: **THE DATA**--Significant Rates

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

IV. Observer Feedback: Things that went **well** during the lesson/session.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
_____
_____

V. Observer Feedback: Things I **might** change in a similar future situation.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

VI. **Only after 3 or more sessions.**

Teacher Selected Target Behavior _____ Rate Per Min _____

Comments: _____

_____